Telephone Messages on Tape Cause Protest to FCC

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CHICAGO—A tape-recorded telephone message operation, which is labeling the Peace Corps as "subversive," has led the Anti-Defamation League to file a protest with the Federal Communications Commission.

The FCC was asked to initiate proceedings requiring telephone companies to curb "flagrant abuses of their recorded message service" such as those listed against Let Freedom Ring, Inc., of Sarasota, Fla.

The League took the action a few days after issuing a special four-page "Facts" edition for August, devoted exclusively to the "Let Freedom Ring" operation across the Nation.

The report links the LFR telephone-recording setup to the John Birch Society and calls it "a new voice of the radical right in America."

The petition charges that the anonymous recordings make "abusive and extremist attacks and libels on individuals and institutions."

Obscene, fraudulent and libelous statements are not within the area of constitutionally protected speech, the League's petition asserts. It acknowledges the telephone companies cannot be held liable if they have no knowledge of the libelous intent of the messages broadcast on their automatic announcement service. However, the petition declares, once the officials of the phone company are informed of libelous content of a message, the company should be able to deny use of its facilities for such messages.

The Chicago operation has been under careful watch of Illinois Bell Telephone Co. officials since its inception earlier this year. Similar phone setups are operating in nearby communities of Illinois and Indiana, according to the Chicago office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Each message usually concentrates on one subject with a closing appeal to send 25 cents to either a local or a Florida postal box number for literature on the topic.

Last week's Chicago message, for example, declares: "The Peace Corps, long a sacred cow of the Administration, has become a taxpayer-financed anti-American, brainwashing operation for America's youth. One gets the uneasy feeling that something akin to the Hitler Youth movement, with a Communist twist, has been born in America and is spawning its poison here and abroad."

An April message on former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, which called him "an ersatz conservative with a pro-Communist record" and "one of the greatest phonies ever put over on the American people," first brought the Let Freedom Ring telephone setup to public attention here.

In October, 1964, Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) in a Senate speech said after one tape contended that U.S. military forces were demoralized, that Pentagon analysis of the tape "makes it clear how propagandists make full use of half-truths as well as outright falsehoods to give their message the appearance of credulity." He said the group was spreading "suspicion, hate and invective" in six states.

The Anti-Defamation League's report last week declares the LFR "stations" are now found in many of the major cities plus a host of smaller ones.

The messages come from tapes supplied by LFR's creator, Dr. William Campbell Douglass, a Sarasota physician listed by the Anti-Defamation League as a John Birch member. In his literature, Dr. Douglass says his is "a nonprofit corporation established to disseminate anti-Communist, anti-Socialist, pro-American broadcasts via a telephone tape recording. Your 'customer' dials a number and gets two minutes of anti-Communist dynamite."

But ADL said in both its report and its FCC petition that the scripts consist of "lurid visions of a 'Communist conspiracy' lurking behind civil rights, the United Nations, the Supreme Court, the last three U.S. Presidents, the State Department, the press, the National Council of Churches, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Anti-Defamation League, and so on."